



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

13 August 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Melvin R. Laird
The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT : Enemy Activity in the DMZ Area

1. In response to your informal request, levied during your 10 August session with Mr. Carver, we have reviewed the current and recent patterns of enemy activity in and around the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The short answer to your basic question is that we have been unable to detect any unusual or significant changes in the levels or types of enemy military or logistical activity in this general area.

2. Military activity within and immediately south of the DMZ has remained at a relatively low level during past weeks and infiltration rates into the DMZ area remain well below those of the past two years. Aside from a small amount of road construction inside the zone, which appears to be a departure from previous policy, logistical activity seems to be following normal patterns. The improved western DMZ routes that lead from North Vietnam to southern Laos are more active than they were a year ago, but this could be explained by the presence of the 559th Transportation Group which, unlike last year, has remained in Laos during the current rainy season.

3. Hanoi's response to any Allied incursions into the Demilitarized Zone north of the actual Provisional Military Demarcation Line (PMDL) would certainly be influenced by the size and duration of the Allied operations. Cost-benefit calculations would probably deter the Communists from massive military counteraction in the DMZ itself, but we would expect a sharp rise in Communist military action in MR 1, probably including a shelling or rocketing of major population centers such as Danang and Hue. In the political

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arena, Hanoi would read such Allied incursions as confirmation of its view that the U.S. has little real interest in seeking a negotiated settlement and is inclined to rely on military pressure. The postulated Allied actions would certainly prompt harsh propaganda denunciations from Hanoi and would probably produce at least a temporary increase in Communist intransigence in Paris.

4. The details of the current situation in and near the DMZ and a more detailed analysis of Hanoi's probable response to Allied incursions into the DMZ are set forth in the attached annex to this memorandum.

Richard Helms
Director

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O/DCI/SAVA:GACarver/mee 13Aug70

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ANNEX: Matters Germane to Secretary Laird's 10 August 1970
Query on the Demilitarized Zone

I. Recent Communist Military Activity in the DMZ Area

1. During the past few weeks enemy military activity within the Demilitarized Zone has remained at a relatively low level.

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This activity has consisted of movement by small groups of enemy troops that have not directly threatened Allied forces south of the zone. Between 4 and 8 August the number of such sightings nearly doubled, but the increase in enemy movement did not result in any significant increase in fighting along the zone.

2. During the latter part of July the North Vietnamese shelled several Allied positions located just below the DMZ (near Camp Carroll and Fire Support Base Fuller) and they attacked Gio Linh District town, but harassing actions on this scale have been carried out intermittently by the Communists ever since the 1968 bombing halt.

II. Infiltration and Logistical Activity in the DMZ Area

A. Infiltration

3. About 2,000 infiltrators were scheduled to arrive in the DMZ area and MRTTH during June and July; none are known to be scheduled for arrival after July. The rate of infiltration has been well below that of the past two years. Although three regiments had moved from North Vietnam around the western edge of the DMZ and then into western Quang Tri Province (in the Khe Sanh area) by the end of June, the basic disposition of NVA forces in and around the DMZ has since remained unchanged (ten battalions just north of the DMZ, two battalions in the northern half of the zone, and nine battalions just south of the zone). The recent movement of some elements of the NVA 2nd Division from southern MR 1 (Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces) to Tchepone in Laos puts these units in a position to support activity in the MRTTH, but these moves may have been made in light of what Hanoi saw as needs or requirements in Laos.

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B. Logistical Developments

In the DMZ Proper

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North Vietnamese may have changed their policy, followed since the bombing halt of November 1968, of scrupulously avoiding the building of new roads in the DMZ. Until July road building activity in this area was limited to making improvements in the access to the northern edge of the zone through the upgrading and extension of existing roads, primarily Routes 102 and 103. [REDACTED] two new road segments have been built from existing routes southward into the central DMZ. A ten-foot wide road was observed on 4 July extending off Route 102 in North Vietnam to a point one mile inside the northern half of the DMZ. The second was detected on 21 July and was seen extending south off Route 102, some three miles inside the zone. While neither of these two roads evidenced signs of vehicle use, both appeared to be motorable.

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North of the DMZ

6. [REDACTED] some new construction three miles north of the DMZ area near Route 102 but the type of construction is unknown. However, logistical activity in southern North Vietnam as measured by SLAR returns per sortie hour and trucks noted per mission, plus information on coastal shipping, appear to continue to follow normal patterns. In fact, these sources show activity levels slightly under those seen last year at this time.

7. One additional noteworthy development in Quang Binh Province in recent months has been the continued expansion of a military training

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area near Dong Hoi on Route 101. This area -- 40 miles north of the DMZ -- now contains 400 structures (many of which are believed to be barracks) and has been under construction since late 1969.

Western DMZ

8. Considerable logistical activity continues to take place on the western DMZ routes that lead from North Vietnam to southern Laos. Numerous improvements have been made to these routes over the past year. It is estimated that more than 50% of all the supply input into southern Laos during the last two months of the past dry season entered over these routes.

9. [redacted] the western DMZ routes into the panhandle of Laos are still being moderately used during the present rainy season. [redacted] truck sightings are more than three times higher than those reported last year despite a considerable reduction in attack sorties.

10. It is extremely difficult to distinguish between supplies that may portend an offensive in the DMZ area and supplies that are destined for the lower panhandle or even Cambodia. On balance we believe that the logistical activity being observed in the western DMZ is appropriate to the maintenance of supply to units of the 559th Transportation Group which, unlike last year, have remained in the panhandle of Laos during this year's rainy season.

11. It should be clearly recognized, however, that unlike the VC/NVA logistical position in MR 3 and MR 4, the Communists' position in the DMZ area is strong. Existing stockpiles of weapons and ammunition are probably adequate for the Communists to undertake a large-scale offensive action in or close to the DMZ on short notice.

III. Possible North Vietnamese Reactions to Allied Incursions in the DMZ

A. General

12. The DMZ is a politically sensitive area. The portion north of the PMDL is, after all, part of North Vietnam. Communist restraint in movement across the DMZ was one of the key issues in the 1968 "understandings" that led to the cessation of the bombing of NVN. Thus,

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no matter what the military impact of any Allied operations, Hanoi would feel compelled to assess them primarily in a political context. Hanoi would probably read such moves as confirming the Communist view that the U.S. now has little interest in a negotiated settlement of the war (on terms acceptable to the Communists) and, instead, is in search of a successful military conclusion to the struggle. In its calculations, Hanoi would link any DMZ move to the Vietnamization program and the recent Allied military initiatives in Cambodia. While such calculations might not lead Hanoi to undertake any dramatic riposte, their overall view of the war and U.S. intentions in it would almost certainly be affected.

13. The Communist reaction to an Allied move would depend in part on the size and duration of the actual operations involved. The larger the force and the greater the duration of its operations in the DMZ, the greater would be the likelihood that Hanoi would feel compelled to respond vigorously. Hanoi would obviously see much more reason to respond if the Allied forces moved across the Ben Hai River (the Provisional Military Demarcation Line which splits the DMZ) into NVN itself. (Recent Allied action in the DMZ -- small ground reconnaissance patrols and occasional air and naval bombardments -- have been restricted to the southern half of the DMZ.) Whether the Allied action was undertaken by U.S. or South Vietnamese forces would probably not greatly affect Hanoi's military response; since any ARVN action would be construed as having U.S. approval.

B. Options Open to Hanoi

14. Political/Psychological. At a minimum, Hanoi could be expected to launch a heavy propaganda attack against the Allies, citing the DMZ action as one more example of U.S. disinterest in peaceful settlement of the conflict. The Communists would seek to lay the base for possible military counter moves on their part, and to fan anti-war sentiment in the U.S.

15. At Paris, the Communists would almost certainly become more intransigent, at least for a time, but we doubt that Hanoi would go so far as to break off the talks completely. The Communists appear to see advantage in keeping the Paris forum available; and they have already swallowed Allied actions of a greater magnitude than any postulated DMZ incursions -- i. e., the Cambodian intervention.

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16. It is also possible, of course, that an Allied move into the DMZ might eventually lead Hanoi to a greater interest in the Paris negotiations. The Communists could view the Allied incursion as indicative of a generally tougher U.S. military position, including, perhaps, renewed U.S. bombing of North Vietnam or large-scale movement of Allied forces into the Laotian corridor. The fact that the DMZ assault came on the heels of the Allied move into Cambodia would add additional strength to Hanoi's concern.

17. The past pattern of Communist behavior in Paris would suggest, however, that Hanoi is unlikely to meet increased Allied pressure with political concessions. The Communists appear wedded to the concept that they cannot negotiate from weakness or the appearance thereof. And while there may be room to question whether this concept would prevail under all circumstances, the postulated DMZ actions do not appear to be of a magnitude that would shake Hanoi to the extent necessary to cause it to seek relief by political concessions.

18. Military. Hanoi might view the movement of U.S. forces into the DMZ as an opportunity to inflict sizable casualties. The DMZ area is easily supplied from North Vietnam and additional NVA personnel could be moved to the area quickly. In considering this option, however, Hanoi would have to contemplate the possibility of heavy losses because of Allied air superiority, and weigh the possibility that its action might lead the U.S. to escalatory moves against NVN itself. Such considerations would argue against any massive Communist counter-action against the Allied forces in the DMZ area.

19. A more likely military response would be a generalized stepup in Communist activity in I Corps, perhaps including the shelling of the major urban centers, Hue and Danang. (Hue, Danang, Saigon are the three cities included in the "understanding" reached with Hanoi at the time of the bombing halt of November 1968.) Such action is clearly within the Communists' capabilities, and because of proximity to the DMZ, such action could be justified in propaganda as a countermove to the Allied incursion. Hanoi might also believe that this course could be carried out without much risk of Allied counteraction.

20. Other options open to Hanoi would include increased military action elsewhere in South Vietnam, or in Cambodia or Laos. However,

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we doubt that any major action in these areas, remote from the DMZ, would be undertaken merely in retaliation for Allied incursions into the DMZ, though such incursions might be used as public justification for military moves elsewhere that Hanoi was already intending to initiate.

C. Conclusion: Hanoi's Most Likely Response

21. In addition to a propaganda response, which is pro forma in such cases, we would expect an Allied move into the DMZ area to result in localized military resistance, coupled with an increase in Communist activity in I Corps. The chances of some major urban centers being shelled appear considerably better than even; particularly since the Communists have already violated the 1968 "understanding" concerning the major cities several times over. Beyond this, we would expect the Communists to assess the duration and success of the Allied move before undertaking any more dramatic actions.

22. Hanoi would also be likely to use the Allied move as an excuse to stonewall even more in Paris. If the Communists were planning a diplomatic move at the talks -- and there is no evidence that they are -- the Allied move would almost certainly lead them to postpone it for some time. To some extent, Hanoi would look to developments in the U.S. itself as a guide concerning the political mileage to be made from the Allied move. If, as was the case following the Allied move into Cambodia, the U.S. action set off a widespread renewal of anti-war sentiment in the U.S., Hanoi would be encouraged that the U.S. might feel compelled to cease its activities in the DMZ. If so, Hanoi might reason that a modest military response coupled with intransigence in Paris and propaganda gestures would serve as the most productive blend of responses.

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